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Testimony in support of:

**HB 5419 AN ACT FARMS, FOOD AND JOBS**

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*The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, a statewide nonprofit membership organization of over 5,000 families dedicated to farmers and the future of Connecticut agriculture.*

**Connecticut Farm Bureau supports HB 5419, An Act Concerning Farms, Food and Jobs.**

Senator Meyer, Representative Roy, and Members of the Environment Committee:

The Connecticut Farm Bureau Association strongly supports the broad goals HB 5419 An Act Concerning Farms, Food and Jobs. This is an exciting measure that seeks to stoke the economic engine of Connecticut agriculture. This bill is about local farms and local jobs!

There has been an explosion in the interest and demand for locally grown foods. Connecticut citizens want access to healthy, safe, Connecticut Grown products. Passage of HB 5419 will go a long way in helping meet that demand. There is no question that HB 5419 will have a positive impact on the ability of local family farms to increase their bottom lines by producing and selling Connecticut grown food products. Consumers want locally grown food and Connecticut farmers want to supply it. There is growing consumer desire to know their farmers and where their food comes from. This is a phenomenon that has taken hold across the county.

HB 5419 seeks to enhance the availability of acidified foods and poultry, protect small scale community farms, provide farmer training and make minor adjustments to statute governing farmer's markets recognizing markets that are not conducted throughout the season.

Section 3 of the bill allows farmers to produce a wider variety of value-added food products on the farm by allowing the production of acidified foods in much the same way that they can make jellies and jams today. This will not only be a boost for the local economy but a great help to many small farm families.

While current state law allows jams and jellies to be made and sold on residential farms, it requires that most other food products be prepared in government inspected commercial kitchens. The requirements for such kitchens are extensive and expensive. The cost of constructing and equipping such a facility is a barrier that many small farm operations simply

cannot overcome. HB 5419 includes many safeguards: A very restrictive definition of acidified foods and requiring a laboratory pH test of the completed recipe, an annual water test and safe food handling training that is approved by the Connecticut Department of Public Health. HB 5419 will go a long way in helping farmers in Connecticut take advantage of a short growing season by making acidified foods that they can sell all year long and at a higher return.

Section 4 of the bill will give the Connecticut Milk Promotion Board access to dollars that are mandatorily taken from dairy farmers' milk checks under the federal Check-Off program for milk promotion efforts. Currently all Connecticut dairy farmer dollars go to support national and regional milk promotion efforts. The Connecticut Milk Promotion Board seeks the enabling language contained in this bill so that they might promote the Connecticut dairy industry and the production of local milk. We have all seen the commercials that claim "California cows are happy cows." The Connecticut dairy industry needs access to dairy farmer dollars taken from their milk checks so that they might compete and promote the value of a healthy Connecticut dairy industry.

Section 7 of HB 5419 seeks to amend current law to allow for greater opportunities to process and sell locally grown poultry. There is incredible demand for local poultry and a severe lack of processing in Connecticut that hampers farmers' ability to provide quality product and expand operations. There is an overwhelming need to change the status quo.

**Connecticut Farm Bureau recognizes that the bill needs refinement in several areas and stands ready to assist in any way it can help modify language to achieve desired goals.**

**This proposal is all about quality agricultural jobs and growing Connecticut's farm businesses. Connecticut Farm Bureau asks the Environment Committee to support local farms and local jobs and respectfully requests you act favorably on HB 5419, AAC Farms, Food and Jobs.**

## **Production and Sale of Acidified Foods on Residential Farms**

### What the Bill does

- This is a common sense bill that promotes local agriculture and healthy local foods. It allows the production and sale of acidified foods such as pickles, tomato sauce and salsa and their sale at farm stands and farmer's markets.
- This bill would legalize the production of acidified foods in much the same ways that jellies and jams have been successfully and legally prepared in residential farm kitchens for many years.

### Why it's important for local farms

- Current state statute mandates that most food products (other than jams, jellies, preserves and maple syrup) be prepared in government inspected kitchens. The requirements for such are very expensive and an insurmountable barrier for most small family farms.
- Under current law, farmers are prohibited from turning the "vegetables" of their labor into acidified value-added products
- The Pickle Bill makes it economically viable for farmers to expand, produce and sell new value-added products right on the farm.
- Consumers want and trust local foods Connecticut and want to purchase these products directly from CT farmers.

### The Bill has many safeguards

- Defines "acidified food product" as a food item with a pH of 4.6 or less upon completion of the product.
- Requires the completed recipe to be tested by an independent laboratory to ensure that it has a pH level of 4.6 or less.
- Requires those producing acidified foods in residential farm kitchens to successfully complete a safe food handling course approved by the CT Department of Public Health.
- Excludes potentially hazardous foods as defined by the FDA including meat, dairy, eggs, fish, poultry and shellfish
- Requires the annual testing of private water supplies of residential farm kitchens
- Requires a label stating the product is "not prepared in a government inspected kitchen."
- Acidified foods are among the safest foods you can buy.
- Foods with a pH level of 4.6 or less cannot support botulism.
- Pickling is an age-old method of food preservation. People have preserved their food this way for hundreds of years.
- The following states allow production of acidified foods in residential kitchens with appropriate safeguards: Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Nebraska..

